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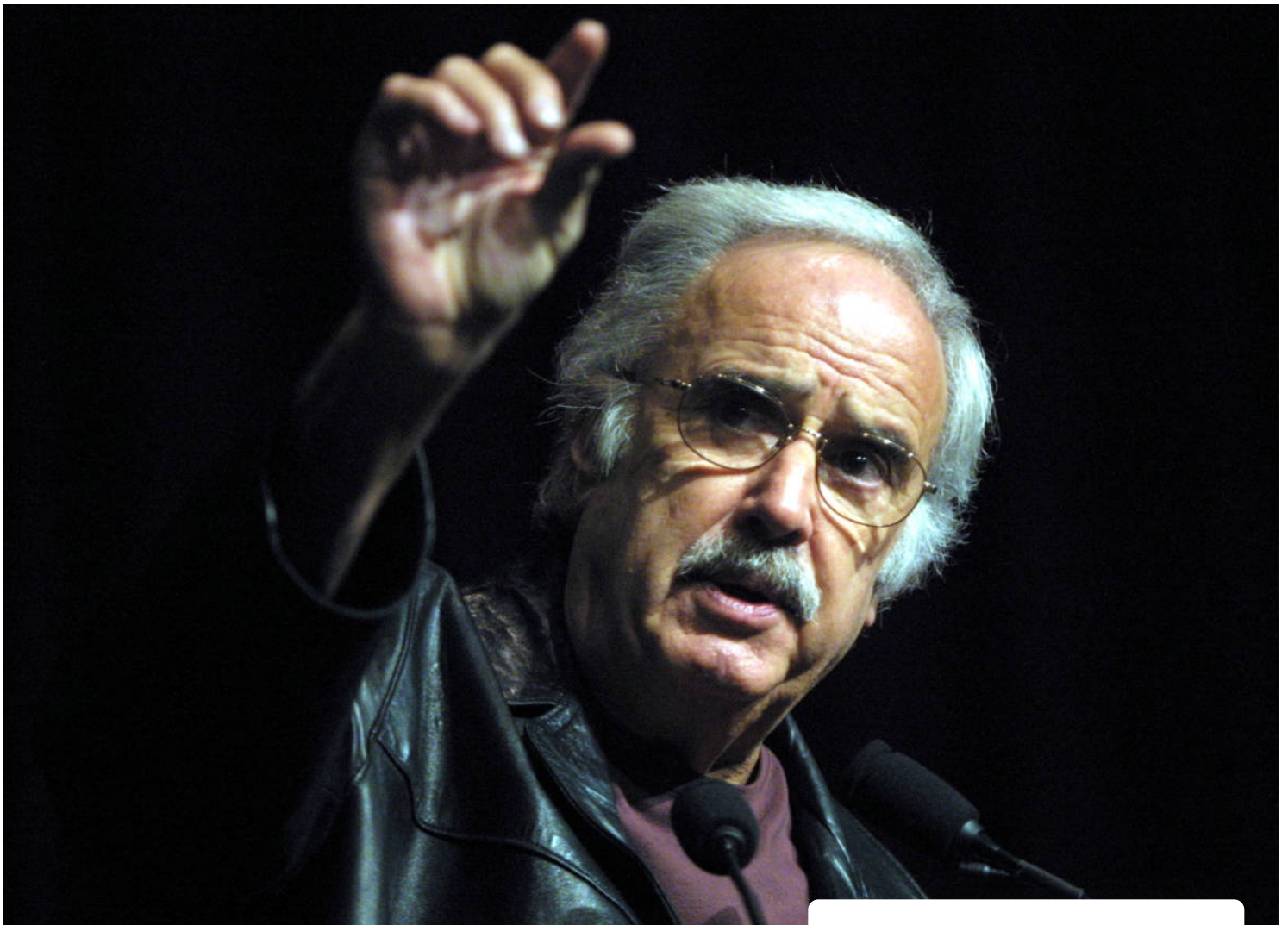
Exiting the Political Stage



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By [Scott Shafer](#)

May 19, 2017



John Burton, speaks at a conference called, 'Our democracy after 9/11: can we save it?' on Flores/Getty Images)

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The California Democratic Party will undergo a historic transition in Sacramento this weekend, when its legendary chairman, John Burton, steps down after eight years as party chair.

Burton has always been a little rough around the edges.

"I first met John Burton in 1972," recalled Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi. "It was during the McGovern presidential campaign. And I went over to introduce myself to him. And he completely ignored me. I think he thought I wasn't liberal enough," she said, laughing. "I don't know what it was, but he completely dismissed me."

Burton, who at that time was in the state Assembly, remembers it differently.

"No, I talked to her," Burton insisted, a little defensively. "But I really got to know her when she ran for Congress in 1987."

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By then, Pelosi was like family to the Burtons, and what became known as a "death bed endorsement" of Pelosi by Phillip Burton's widow Sala helped propel her to victory after Sala Burton died.

California Democrats Gather For Convention As John Burton Says Goodbye



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The Burtons -- John and his late brother **Phillip** -- are like political royalty in San Francisco's Democratic Party circles. They, along with Willie Brown and later Pelosi, engineered what became known by critics as "the Burton Machine."

Former Assembly speaker and San Francisco mayor Willie B
when both were freshmen college students at San Francisco State University.

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"We were in the same ROTC unit, believe it or not, probably avoiding the draft," Brown recalled with a chuckle recently. "We were alphabetically lined up the first day. And it's Brown, Burton. So we were almost soul brothers from day one."

Brown said the two always thought of themselves as "disrupters of everything. We were trying to keep other people from destroying things," like the Fillmore neighborhood, which was long eyed by the city's Redevelopment Agency.

Brown recalled that, even back then, Burton was tight with progressive activists.

"Through the labor movement they knew him," Brown said. "Through the left wing socialist, communist movement they knew him. Longshoremen and Harry Bridges' crowd. So John was very much exposed in every way."



Willie Brown and John Burton collaborated on this campaign flier when Burton ran unsuccessfully for a state Senate seat in 1967. (CSU Sacramento Archives)

John Burton has spent four decades in California politics -- starting in the state Assembly in the mid-1960s, moving then to Congress, back to the Assembly, and finally to the California Gov. Jerry Brown said no matter where he was, Burton always

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"He was always there in the Legislature and he was pushing against more conservative people," Gov. Brown said.

Burton didn't always see eye to eye with Jerry Brown. In fact, when Brown chaired the California Democratic Party, Burton called for him to resign after the party lost the 1990 gubernatorial election. But time has a way of softening those differences.

"He's a very colorful, imaginative person who really cares a lot," Brown told me recently over a plate of lox and dried apricots. "He cares for people who don't have the advantages -- he's really an old-fashioned Democrat."

California Republican Party Chair Jim Brulte served in the state Senate with Burton and said he was willing to work with Republicans -- to an extent.

"John was very clear," Brulte said. "If I need Republican votes I'll talk to you. And if I don't, I won't. I thought 'OK, I can deal with that.'"



John Burton with then Governor-Elect Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2003. (ROBYN BECK/AFP/Getty Images)

The way Willie Brown tells it, Burton palled around with Rep. ... Help us build a place of trust 🧡
GOP had power in Sacramento. Brown remembers Burton's outings to San Francisco with

Republican legislators.

"John was really close to those guys," Brown said. "And they'd come into the city and John would take them to the Tenderloin or some other place. Because John had *connections* in those days," Brown said, laughing at the implication.

In Sacramento, Burton was known for being blunt and scrappy, dropping f-bombs on a regular basis. Today, at age 84, he's a bit frail. But he clearly relishes the impact he had.

"When I left Sacramento, poor people, old, blind, disabled and women on what they used to call welfare had more money than they had when I came in," Burton said. "I think the important thing is if you're in a position of power or influence or whatever I had or anybody has -- you take care of those who ain't got it, who don't have the power."

'You know fighting for people and being able to win or improve their lives -- for me makes all the bullshit worth it.'

—John Burton

In 1974, Burton followed his brother Phil to Congress. But addiction to drugs forced him to give up his Congressional seat in the early '80s.

"When I smoked I was two packs a day," Burton said recently. "I just have an addictive personality."

Burton eventually got his addiction under control. But he never lost his addiction to helping those who were vulnerable, especially foster care children.

"If I was dumped like they were, there's no doubt in my mind I woulda been in jail somewhere," he said. "Just no doubt."

After leaving the Legislature in 2005, Burton created **John Burton Advocates for Youth**, a foundation that helps lobby on behalf of young people.

Executive Director Amy Lemley credited Burton with helping to pass **AB 12** in 2010, which ultimately extended services to foster care youth beyond ages 18 to 21. It enabled them to stabilize their lives as they entered college or the workforce.

"For homeless youth and foster youth to have an advocate like John Burton in their corner has made it possible to achieve things that we never would have

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As Burton prepares to step down as chair of the California Democratic Party this weekend, he leaves behind an operation that helped Democrats win two-thirds majorities in the state Assembly and Senate, along with every statewide office. But it's also still roiled by the divide between the party's most liberal members and those who want to stay the course.

That split is playing out in the race to replace Burton. Party insider **Eric Bauman** from Los Angeles was long considered a shoo-in to replace Burton, but in recent weeks **Kimberly Ellis**, an African-American woman with support from the Sanders wing of the party, appears to be closing in.

For his part, Burton hopes to be remembered this way. "You know fighting for people and being able to win or improve their lives -- for me makes all the bullshit worth it," he said.

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THE BAY

The California Republicans Who Helped Enable Wednesday's Attack on the Capitol



By Devin Katayama , Marisa Lagos , Ericka Cruz Guevarra , Kyana Moghadam, Alan Montecillo  Jan 8



House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-California, attends a news conference following a GOP caucus meeting at the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center Feb. 13, 2019 in Washington, D.C. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

California is a blue state run by Democrats. But we have elected officials who have either ignored or enabled President Trump through the years — including on Wednesday, when a pro-Trump mob violently took over the U.S. Capitol to disrupt elect Joe Biden's victory, in the name of baseless claims about

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"So much of what drove so many of these people to come to Washington and to perpetrate this assault is tied to the conspiracy theories that are online, the lies that the president tells about the election," said **Marisa Lagos**, KQED politics correspondent and co-host of the Political Breakdown podcast.

"When you combine the support or just the kind of sweeping under the rug of some of these actions, you end up really fueling the fire," she said.

Even after the process resumed, seven out of ten House Republicans from California voted to overturn Arizona's and Pennsylvania's electoral votes.

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The Bay's Devin Katayama spoke with Marisa Lagos about why this matters to Californians, even after Trump leaves office.

Below are interview highlights from our conversation with Marisa. They've been edited for brevity and clarity. Read the full transcript [here](#).

Devin Katayama: I think it's really easy for a lot of people to say, 'Well, this happened at the U.S. Capitol, it doesn't really represent California. We're a blue state.' So what role do you think that California lawmakers played in fueling what happened at the Capitol?

Marisa Lagos: Republican lawmakers in California have either supported President Trump throughout his four years in office and really enabled him, or have largely stayed silent. And so I think that in either case, you can place some responsibility at the foot of these leaders for either enabling or ignoring the type of behavior that led to the horrific events in the Capitol on Wednesday.

DK: And why is that important to look at California lawmakers when it comes to accountability?

ML: These are our leaders. We elect them to be leaders. I know party politics rules, but at the end of the day, whether you're a Republican or Democrat or

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independent shouldn't matter when it comes to protecting our democracy, upholding its principles and particularly we talk about the fundamental right of free and fair elections, which just underpins everything we do. I think other than the First Amendment, I can't think of a more important part of it.

Whether somebody like House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy standing by the president, or it's people like Devin Nunes who are defending him on Fox News— it all kind of adds up to the mess we really saw play out in the Capitol.

You can't just sit by the sidelines and be an observer, particularly when you see someone like Shannon Grove, the Senate Republican leader, tweeting that Antifa is responsible, not right-wing extremists, for this assault on the Capitol, **and then erasing it** and saying, 'Oh, it wasn't complete.' I mean, come on. You are fueling the fire.

DK: So what were congressional Republicans from California saying in the lead up to the vote to certify the results on Wednesday?

ML: We've seen a real kind of mix of responses. You have had Kevin McCarthy, the minority leader, just really stand with Trump.

You did see Tom McClintock, very conservative member from the greater Sacramento area, speak out against it. He was the only GOP member in the California delegation to actually vote against overturning the Arizona results. The thing that I've seen as a member of the media most over the past four years is often just ducking the question.

DK: Ducking the question has kind of been a thing that politicians have done in the past. But what you're saying is in this moment, ducking the question and not saying either how you feel or what you stand for is actually harmful, and actually has led also to what happened on Wednesday.

ML: Yes, silence is complicity. When you have a president who is just blowing up the norms of our nation, the democratic constitutional norms, when you have somebody you know who is questioning the vote we all took as members of this democracy, I just don't think you get credit because in the final hours of his presidency you broke with him — especially when you stayed silent this whole time.

There's so much fear among the Republican establishment about alienating Trump's base that it seemed like they were willing to just kind of roll over. And I think that that's true for many Republicans in California as well.

DK: In a way, the silence has just transferred to condemning violence as the new line.

ML: Let's be clear: The state GOP and others within it are toeing this crazy conspiracy line, either claiming that Antifa infiltrated these patriots and is responsible for the violence, or kind of a step down from that where we see this kind of 'whataboutism' — "what about the Black Lives Matter activist who destroyed property this summer or were violent?' Even that to me speaks to this kind of fear of the base and this willingness to kind of go along with a narrative that is convenient for them politically because you're trying to have it both ways.

I've seen nothing from any of these representatives talking about what Trump *did* say when he told the crowd that he loves them. It is, I think, the ultimate in political trying to kind of have your cake and eat it, too.

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